

Final Reflective Practice Portfolio

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Introduction

My experience in the Mostly Online Masters program for Art Education at Ohio State University has been a positive and transformative experience for me. The courses and teachers have provided me with an incredible amount of encouragement and support. They have also been an invaluable source of inspiration for me as a new teacher needing to create an engaging art curriculum for my students.

Two years ago, I found myself making a major career change, and at the same time, taking on many new learning experiences. I applied for a position as an Art Teacher at a new charter school, which had partnered with an organization called Expeditionary Learning (EL). I began completing the requirements for receiving a teaching license as an Alternative Resident Educator through the Ohio Department of Education, and I also applied for the graduate program in the Art Education Department at OSU. All these things happened within a year of having my first child, and little did I know that before the two years was over, I would have a second child.

The Mostly Online Art Ed program was flexible enough so that I never felt too overwhelmed by the demands of it, and it fit seamlessly into the other activities of my daily life. The program often complemented what was happening at my school, and it fit well with the EL model that my school uses. Expeditionary Learning is a national program that focuses on learning through real world experience. They provide a framework of principles, protocols, and resources for schools who choose to use their model. Each school is also teamed up with a support person, called a “school designer,” who regularly visits to provide motivation and support for the school’s staff.

The school I teach at is Graham Expeditionary Middle School (GEMS) in Columbus, Ohio. It is an public charter school that serves a predominantly urban student population. Many of our students are at or below the poverty level and receive free

lunches. Our student population is a mixture of Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic students. GEMS is part of The Graham Family of Schools, which includes a primary school (GPS), and two high schools (The Graham School and the The Charles School). The Graham School prepares students for their future careers by allowing them to participate in on-site internships with an organization in the career of their choice. The Charles School prepares students for college by allowing them to take college courses early and receive free college credit.

All of the courses I have taken through the OSU graduate program have been relevant, and I have been able to incorporate all of them, in some way, into my teaching. For example, I developed a lesson about digital storytelling for my 8th grade students, using the information I learned during the Digital Storytelling course taught by Dr. Eisenhauer. I also try to incorporate Big Ideas whenever I can into my curriculum. I learned about Big Ideas and artmaking during my first graduate course with Dr. Walker. Art:21 and contemporary artists have become a major part of my curriculum. The curriculum development and artmaking courses helped me become comfortable using Art:21 as a resource.

Art criticism and multiculturalism are the two areas that I am constantly striving to incorporate more of in the classroom. Because of this, they are the two courses that I chose to do my research on. Art criticism is important to me because I never had the opportunity, before college, to talk about and discuss art. This is so important to understanding why artists create. Incorporating art criticism allows me to focus more on conceptual ideas, instead of just focusing on the process. Multiculturalism is important for me to incorporate in the art classroom because it emphasizes the point that we should make our classrooms a reflection of our students and their backgrounds. This allows students to relate more to what is being taught, and to find deeper connections.

During my first year of teaching, I began presenting a project-based curriculum. After going through the Mostly Online Art Ed program, I feel that my curriculum is

more well-rounded. The projects have more purpose and meaning behind them, and the students are thinking more critically about the artwork they create. My curriculum is still a work in progress, as it should be, but I feel that it is heading in the right direction, and as a teacher, I feel more confident in the decisions I am making about what and how to present art education to my students.

Art Criticism

Overview

The Art Criticism course taught by Dr. Jennifer Eisenhauer provided a framework for talking about artwork with different groups of people from different backgrounds. It offered suggestions and an outline of how to conduct discussions. It also gave examples of artworks being criticized from different perspectives. The focus of this course was on pluralism. Every person has a valid viewpoint when talking about a piece of artwork. The artist is not always available to state what their intention was with the art that they made, so it is often up to the viewer to use their own knowledge and experiences when interpreting art.

The text used for this course was *Interpreting Art* by Terry Barrett. It was a great resource, and provided practical ways to conduct art interpretation activities with various age groups. I used many ideas straight from the text, and applied them to my classroom. Some of the artists that Barrett provided as examples, I chose to use in my interpretation lessons.

Beliefs and Values

The art criticism course gave me a new perspective on interpreting art. I had previously held the belief that the artist's perspective was the only valid perspective of a work of art. This course made me realize that there are many different ways of looking at and interpreting a piece of art. It ignited my excitement in trying different approaches to talking about art.

As a result of this course, I began incorporating more segments of talking about art into my classroom. I planned lessons that devoted the entire class period to talking about art. I noticed the interest the students showed in discussing art. They seemed to really enjoy talking about artwork in different ways.

The problem I initially had was getting past the idea that only the artist's interpretation was the correct one. I also had to learn that there was a structure to interpreting art, and that not everything would be considered a good interpretation. I learned that it was important to push for more information during an interpretation, and get to the "why" of it.

One example of an interpreting art lesson plan I used was one that incorporated the artwork of Edward Hopper. I had the students look at a few of his artworks, and then choose one to write a short story about. The stories the students created were very creative and interesting. They were eager to write and share their stories with the rest of the class.

I first had the students look at Hopper's artwork. The pieces I included were, "Chop Suey," "Nighthawks," and "Cape Cod Evening." I initially gave the students about 10 minutes to write their stories, but many needed more time. I then asked the students to share their stories with the other students at their table. Once they had done this, I asked if there were students who wanted to share their stories with the entire class. I asked for the student with the best story at each table to come to the front and share their story. Many students were eager to volunteer

One student created a suspenseful thriller about the people sitting in the restaurant in "Chop Suey." Another student wrote a poem from the perspective of one of the woman in this painting, exclaiming her love of coffee. Using inspiration from "Cape Cod Evening," one student wrote an interesting prose from the perspective of the dog in the painting. Some students picked up on the

disengaged expressions of the people in “Nighthawks” and wrote about that. One student wrote from the perspective of someone walking down the street and seeing that scene take place.

Another way that I have incorporated criticism into the classroom is through the use of sketchbooks. Each student in my class is required to make a sketchbook, which they use at the beginning of each class. I have an image and prompt on the projector, which students use to write their responses in their sketchbooks. Sometimes the prompt will ask them to create a story. Other times, I will have the students answer questions related to the image. For example, I projected one of Frida Kahlo’s self-portraits, “The Two Fridas,” and had students answer questions, such as, “Why did the artist paint herself twice?”

After incorporating more criticism into my curriculum, I realized how necessary it is, and how much it enriches the experience of learning about and making art. Students love to have their voices heard. They enjoy thinking about images in new ways. I noticed that when someone would share their ideas about an artwork, other students would begin making new connections, seeing the same artwork in a different way.

Art criticism is necessary for students because it allows them to reflect on the purposes for making art, and the thought processes involved in it. This then carries over into their (the students) own artwork. The process of discussing artwork is not only necessary, but also enriching for students because it provides them with a safe place to discuss their thoughts and ideas. I work hard to ensure that students feel comfortable discussing all of their thoughts, regardless of how far-fetched it may initially seem.

Lesson and Unit Plan Development

During my first year of teaching, I did all of my lesson plans day-to-day. There was not much advance planning that took place. There were benefits and

downfalls to this method. One of the benefits was that I could easily incorporate the techniques and practices I was learning about in my graduate work. One of the downfalls was that my lesson plans and curriculum did not have any real sense of cohesion. I would loosely develop an outline of the topics I wanted to teach, and then as the year went on, I would decide what artists and art skills I wanted to focus on.

I selected the artists I chose to present to students based on my own individual knowledge or exposure to those artists. For example, I chose to present the artwork of Rene Magritte because he was an artist I was learning about in my graduate course. If I had not been learning about him, I probably would not have thought to include him. The artists I chose to represent did not always relate directly to the projects we were doing in class. It was more based on my own personal preference.

The first artist I used for interpretation purposes in my lesson plans was Rene Magritte. The information provided to me about him in the book for the course, was very interesting. Also, after reading about him and his artwork, I felt more comfortable discussing his work. I showed students a few of his works, and asked them to try and figure out what the artist could be symbolizing through the images he used in his artwork. I asked for a few volunteers to share their responses with the class, and then I collected all of the written responses as part of their warm-up activity.

Another artist I used for an interpretation activity was Henri Matisse. For this activity, I had students look at several of Matisse's collages. They were then asked to determine what they thought was being represented in each image, and to come up with a title for each one. I received a variety of creative responses. For most of the images, I wasn't sure what they were supposed to represent either. After several students had volunteered their interpretations of the image, I would reveal what the actual title was. This interpretation activity was followed by a negative space project using construction paper.

The lesson plan using the artwork of Edward Hopper was presented during my first year of teaching. This was before I had access to a projector, so I usually had to print of colored copies of each image and pass them out to each table. Once the images were passed out, I had the students silently look at the images and write about one of them. I also gave each student a worksheet to fill out (See Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1 (Example of worksheet given to students)

Edward Hopper Interpretive Activity

1.) Briefly describe each painting:

- *Nighthawks*

- *Chop Suey*

- *Cape Cod Evening*

2.) What similarities or common themes do you notice between the paintings?

3.) What major differences do you notice between the paintings?

4.) Creative writing exercise: Choose one painting and write a short story, poem, or narrative about it.

After student finished filling out their worksheets, they were instructed to put their pencil in the cup I had placed at each table. Once all the pencils from each student at their table were in the cup, the students were able to begin sharing their stories with each other. Once each student had shared their story, they voted on which one they thought was the best at their table, and that person was nominated to share their writing with the rest of the class.

Before the Art Criticism course, I had a somewhat narrow view of how to interpret artworks, and how to incorporate criticism in the classroom. I didn't include very many activities that allowed the students to share their perspective of an artwork. I limited class critiques to discussing the finished art projects that were done in class. I think this created a disconnect between how the students felt about artwork created by professional artist, and their own artwork. Now that I've incorporated more criticism into my lessons, students seem to feel more connected to the artists we learn about, and I have seen an improvement in the artwork they create in class.

I have also noticed an increase in the students' willingness to share their viewpoints. There are some days where almost every student in the class wants to share their perspective on an artwork, and this sometimes leads to larger discussions.

This year, I have not devoted an entire class period to interpreting a piece of art, but I continue to incorporate many opportunities for students to discuss works of art. The biggest difficulty I've faced is making sure there is enough time for the students to work on projects. Some students have complained that "we never make art in art class anymore." Some students have voiced their concerns that they think "art is boring now, and we used to have more fun last year." Most of these comments have come from my 7th grade classes, which I have only been seeing once a week. In addition to that, two of the three 7th grade classes I

teach, fall on a Monday or a Friday, and our school has a lot of those days off. I have since had to adjust the 7th grade curriculum, so that there is a better balance between talking about art and making art.

One recent example of an art criticism lesson I presented was an interpretation lesson on the artwork of Michael Ray Charles. I had students work in groups of about 4 or 5. Each group received an image of the artwork of Michael Ray Charles, and they were asked to determine what they thought the meaning was. Each student was given a few minutes to look over the image individually, and write their thoughts down in their sketchbook. They were then given time in their groups to discuss the image, and to try to come to a consensus of what they thought the image symbolized. After they discussed the image in their groups, I projected each image, one at a time, on the projector, and asked each group to present their findings to the class.

Many of my classes did very well with this interpretation activity. A couple of my classes still didn't understand his work, and called it "racist." The activity opened up questions about race, and the portrayal of race in the media. The majority of the students in my classes seemed to understand what Michael Ray Charles was trying to accomplish through his artwork. For example, one group of students looked at the image titled, "Beware." They noticed that the outfit the character in the image was wearing was similar to the outfit the Mickey Mouse wears. This prompted some students to make the connection to Disney, and the racism that existed in that company's past.

There is a big difference in using an artist like Michael Ray Charles versus an artist like Matisse. First, Michael Ray Charles is a contemporary artist, so he is usually more approachable and relatable for the students, than an artist like Matisse would be. Matisse was pushing boundaries in his time, but when you take his work into the context of current time, then it doesn't seem that life altering. Matisse was more about process than concept, and Charles was more

about concept than process. It is important to include both types of artists, so that students can see there are different ways of working.

I have not conducted any class critiques of student artwork this year. I have been reevaluating the way I have done critiques in the past. I am no longer comfortable using the same methods I have used before. I used to gather students in a large group around all the artworks, and then have students share their feedback on whatever works they wanted to talk about. This can easily become a stressful situation for students, especially when someone may make a negative comment.

I've been looking for other approaches to doing class critiques. The text for the Art Criticism course provided some helpful alternatives, such as looking at the artwork of students who aren't in the class that is conducting the critique. I am also considering trying written critiques, but I still worry about the negative or insensitive comments that some students may write. Before I continue doing class critiques, I will need to work with students on developing their artistic vocabulary, which I think is occurring through the art interpretations we're doing in class. I will also need to work with student on how to make helpful suggestions, instead of hurtful judgments.

Overall, my lesson and unit plans have benefited from the addition of interpretation activities. My lessons are more interesting because I'm not lecturing the students on what they should think about a particular artist and their artwork. Students are able to relate to the artworks more because they are pulling from their own experiences to try to understand the work. The lessons I create are more student-centered now, and this has helped to increase student engagement.

Teaching Practices

The Art Criticism course introduced new ways to conduct critiques, and encouraged flexibility with the critique process. The text emphasized the point that it was important to consider what artworks are being shown and what artworks are being omitted in the classroom. This can affect the student's interpretation of the artist and their overall impression of the art world in general.

This concept was fairly new to me. I had never really considered the artworks I was showing in class. I usually just defaulted to showing the artworks that I was most familiar with, which were the ones that were shown to me in school. I realized that it's important to look at an artist's full body of work before deciding which artworks to show. This helps to minimize biases, and it also helps the instructor to have a better overall understanding of the artist and their work.

I abandoned my old practice of showing only the most well-known works of an artist. I have adopted the practice of showing works that relate to the current theme or big idea that we are studying. For example, I incorporated the big idea of identity and the theme of self-portraits into my unit plan. So, during this unit I had students look at and interpret the work of artist who had done many self-portraits, such as Van Gogh, Kahlo, and Rembrandt. I also had my students look at the work of three contemporary artists who dealt with the big idea of identity: Kehinde Wiley, Michael Ray Charles, and Chuck Close.

One difficulty I have encountered is some students not taking interpretations seriously. They will either just say something to be funny or to get attention. I am not always sure how to approach these situations. Do I just ignore what they said? Do I acknowledge it, and try to point out something in what they said that could lead to a deeper discussion? Do I address the fact that they're not taking it seriously? I currently deal with these situations by briefly acknowledging their contribution to the discussion, and then moving on quickly.

I have one class, in particular, that tries to be funny with every comment that is made. There are only one or two students in the class who take the interpretation activities seriously. This has prompted me to reduce the amount of opportunities for interpretation that I provide to this class. I will probably need to focus on working on their artistic vocabulary and appropriateness when talking about art. However, I'm not sure exactly how to give them the tools and practice they need.

Despite the few exceptions, the majority of my classes handle the interpretation activities very well. They are very thoughtful with their responses, and often offer fresh perspectives on the artwork that I hadn't even considered. I purposely don't try to find out the artist's intention behind an artwork because I don't want it to affect my viewing and the students' viewing of the work. I don't want students to fall into the trap of believing that there is only one valid perspective of a work of art.

A typical day in my classroom consists of students coming in at the beginning of class, and taking their sketchbooks out of their folders. There is an image with a prompt waiting for them on the projector. The prompt may ask them to write, draw, or do both. The first five minutes of class are silent, and the students know that if they finish early, they are to write or draw anything they want in their sketchbooks.

After the initial five minutes of sketchbook time, I will either have the students share their responses with the people at their table or I will ask for volunteers to share with the class. If I give the students table time first, I will then open the floor for volunteers to share with the whole class. When students share, I usually make a point not to comment too much, if at all. I believe I have created an atmosphere in my classroom where students feel comfortable sharing their views of an artwork.

The sketchbook sharing time is usually followed by me providing a little background on the artist, and showing a few more of the artist's works. This is done in powerpoint format. The last slide usually contains critical thinking questions, which I give them time to complete individually, and then go over them as a class. After this, students are usually given some time to work on their projects, or to do an activity related to the artist we learned about.

After evaluating my teaching practice, I realized that I needed to incorporate art criticism more intentionally into my classroom. I had previously thought that making art was more important than talking about art, but came to see that they both have equal importance, and each one reinforces the other. Art criticism was the piece that was missing from my curriculum. It was the piece that allowed students to connect more meaningfully to the artists and art I presented to them.

Student Work

As a result of incorporating more intentional art criticism into my curriculum, student work has improved. Improvements can also be attributed to the other methods I have added to my teaching practice, but I think the biggest portion of the improvement is related to art criticism. Students have expressed to me that they enjoy learning about the work of other artists. Once students have been introduced to an artist by interpreting a piece of their artwork, I then begin to discuss the artist's background and process.

Students connect to the artwork through using their own interpretations to interpret the work, and once that connection is made, it is easier for them to understand things like process and subject matter. This was a new revelation for me, to see this change in students. My biggest fear was that opening artworks up for student criticism would somehow diminish the importance or value of that artwork, but in actuality it helped to do the opposite.

A new practice that I adopted was to begin assessing students written interpretations. I don't grade them for spelling, grammar, or length. I am more interested in if the student replied appropriately to the prompts and was able to make personal connections. I collect students sketchbooks at the end of the trimester, and they are graded using my school's grading system of EE (exceeds expectations), ME (meets expectations), AE (approaching expectations), and JB (just beginning).

Most students fall into the ME category. Students receive an EE if I can tell that they really invested the extra time and effort into their interpretations. Students receive an AE if they are missing a lot of sketchbook assignments or if I can tell they didn't put much effort into them, and students receive a JB if they don't turn one in, or turn in one with hardly any writing in it.

One example of student work that I believe improved as a result of increasing art criticism, is a self-portrait project I had my 8th grade students do. Before beginning the project, the students interpreted the artwork of three contemporary artists: Michael Ray Charles, Chuck Close, and Kehinde Wiley. The objective or Learning Target for their final self-portrait project was, "Using inspiration from the contemporary artists we learned about in class, I can create a self-portrait that addresses a stereotype or misconception about me."

I received many artworks that were EE quality. One student addressed a misconception about her that she was sad or unhappy. She loosely based her artwork on the artwork of Michael Ray Charles (Exhibit 2). She created two animal personas for herself, one being a fox, and the other being a rabbit. She explained that her medication made her act differently than she felt on the inside.

Another student used Kehinde Wiley and Chuck Close for inspiration (Exhibit 3). She drew a portrait of herself, and divided it down the center with a line.

Surrounding the image of herself were words that she had written down after surveying her peers of what they thought of her when they first met her.

One student used Kehinde Wiley as inspiration and created an intricate detailed background surrounding the figures of herself (Exhibit 4). She drew two figures of herself, one in a white dress with no eyes, and another of her in regular clothes. In her artist statement, she described the way people saw her versus the way she really was. She talked about dealing with issues of innocence and whiteness.

Exhibit 2



Exhibit 3

contribute to the quality of the artwork and artist statements. I think that without the interpretation and art criticism that took place in class, the projects wouldn't have been quite as rich and thought-provoking. I would like to display the projects for class critiques, but I am hesitant to do so due to the nature of the type of artwork. Many of these final self-portraits are very personal, and reveal very personal information about each student. I feel that I would need to make sure it is okay with the student before presenting their work for critique.

I think a good way to present the works may be to scan some of the best ones and project them one at a time. I can then have students respond to specific prompts to help direct their thinking towards responses that are positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive. The only downfall to this would be that, with artworks being shown one at a time, it may be difficult to identify similarities between artworks. I could experiment with different ways of grouping and project multiple artworks at a time.

Physical Environment

My first year of teaching, I started out with many ideas of how I wanted the physical environment of the classroom to be. Many of those ideas never became an actuality, but a few of them did. One idea I implemented in the classroom was an artist timeline. As I talked about different artists, I would place an image of their artwork along with their name on a large visual timeline that ran like a boarder in the front of the classroom. The artists I chose for the timeline were usually related to the medium we were studying in class at the time.

The art criticism course did not really focus on the physical environment of the classroom. It dealt more with the content, but it did discuss different ways to conduct critiques that could affect the set-up of the classroom. For example, it mentioned having all the students stand in a group and view a work of art together. In order to do this you would need to have a large space available in the classroom or in the hall, with an area to display the artwork.

Another way critiques can be conducted is in smaller groups. I have also tried this technique in the past. I would take a smaller group of 5 or 6 students to do a critique, while the rest of the class worked on something else. The smaller group environment is less intimidating to students, and sometimes allows you to get better responses, as well as hear from different voices.

Last year, I had a large bulletin board in my classroom that was great for displaying artwork and conducting critiques. This year, I don't have much display space at all. This has contributed to the lack of student critiques done this year. I have had student display their work on their tables and then walk around the room to view their peers work. With this technique, I took an idea from another teacher, and had the students write their feedback on post-it notes. The problem with this is that some students do not get any feedback at all, while others get a lot. Also, some students still write negative or non-serious comments.

In the future, I may give each student a set number of post-it notes to place next to their artwork, and once those notes get filled (one comment per note), then no more feedback can be left for that student. Or, I could require students to write their names on their feedback and then turn it into me first. This would allow me to review the feedback before it gets to the student. It would also allow me to address any negative trends I am noticing with the class or with specific individuals.

Since I have abandoned my old way of conducting critiques, I am still in the process of adopting new practices. I want to make sure that critiques are positive and beneficial experiences for all students. This may result in me developing a physical environment in the classroom that is more student- and small group-centered when it comes to critiques. I would like to be able to get to a comfort level where I am able to let the students conduct critiques on their own without my direct involvement.

The biggest difficulty I have encountered after taking the art criticism is with figuring out which method to employ with critiques of student work. I believe it may help to approach student critiques from more of an interpretive point of view. This is easier to do when the projects provided have more content to them, and aren't just process based.

My classroom environment has changed to accommodate student sketchbooks, which is where a majority of the interpretation activities are written. I have a bin set up for each class to keep their folders. Students are required to have a 2-pocket folder, and to keep their sketchbooks in the front pocket of the folder. This helps students stay organized and keep track of where their sketchbooks are.

My classroom environment has also been changed by the addition of a projector and whiteboard. The projector is central to my curriculum. When I began incorporating more art criticism, I realized that I needed to have a projector in the classroom. I have established a familiar classroom routine, and students know what to expect when they enter the room. They know that there will be an image with a prompt projected on the whiteboard that they will need to respond to during the first 5 minutes of class.

This consistent routine, along with the art criticism activities, has helped to improve my classroom management. During my first year of teaching, students would come in and not know what to expect. It would take a long time to get them settled down, resulting in wasted instructional time. With the way that I have things set up now, it is much easier for me to start the class, and to jump right into meaningful discussions about art.

Talking about art is something I used to take for granted. I never gave it much credit for contributing to the artistic process. My experience with talking about art had mostly been limited to my undergraduate experiences with critiques. Until I took the Art Criticism course, I followed the structure that I had learned through

those previous experiences. I never stopped to consider if that was really the best structure to use when conducting critiques with middle schoolers. The Art Criticism course made me see that there was no one set way to conduct a critique, and no one viewpoint that was correct.

Through taking this course, I was able to reevaluate the ways in which I was having students talk about art. I am still continuing to evaluate my teaching practices, and making adjustments as needed. The course and text provided me with so many different techniques and approaches to try. I have been slowly trying to incorporate some of them into my classroom.

Incorporating art criticism into my classroom has had a significant positive influence on my curriculum and my teaching. It has also positively impacted my students. Engaging in art criticism is what prevents viewing art from being a passive activity. It requires the viewer to consider themselves as an integral part of making a piece of art come alive by giving it personal meaning. As I see my students take part in art criticism, I notice their interest and curiosity about art grow, and I am encouraged to see where it will take them.

Multicultural Art Education

Overview

Taking the Multicultural Development course taught by Dr. Karen Hutzler at The Ohio State University, opened my eyes to the many different facets of diversity that reside within the art classroom. This course introduces students to the wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences that exist in the United States.

The course stresses the importance of being sensitive to the unique circumstances of each child in the classroom. The text for this course is *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society* (8th edition) by Donna M. Gollnick and Philip C. Chinn. There were also various educational articles referenced during this course. Service learning was emphasized during the teaching of this

course, and undertaking a service learning project with a group of students was part of the requirement.

Beliefs and Values

I received a lot of new information during my time in Dr. Hutzel's course. I thought that I knew a lot about discrimination and cultural awareness, but I realized that there was so much more I had to learn. The biggest eye openers for me were the segments on stereotypes of the American family, and the *Ethnic Notions* video, which discussed stereotypical portrayals of African-Americans in advertising.

Before taking this course, I had never really considered there to be a stereotypical family structure. During the course, we read an excerpt from an book by Tammy A. Turner-Vorbeck and Monica Miller Marsh, titled *Other Kinds of Families*. This article discussed how typical American family structure has changed, while the idea of it has not. The idea of the typical American family had been so ingrained in me, that I just accepted it as normal. My previous beliefs were that anything other than the stereotypical family of a husband, a wife, and two children was outside of the norm. The course helped me to reevaluate my thinking about what was considered a "normal family". It made me see that while the idea of a "normal family" was real, a "normal family" did not really exist.

My thinking on stereotypes in advertising was also affected by the information I received through this course. The *Ethnic Notions* film was a very powerful documentary about how negative and harmful images of black people were integrated into mainstream society. These images continue to have an impact on the identity of African-Americans today. The way in which these images were used to shape and control the minds of those who viewed them, was pervasive and shocking. I later showed a small portion of the *Ethnic Notions* film to my 8th grade students during my lesson on identity and stereotypes.

As a result of taking this course, I felt more empowered to present a unit on identity, and to deal with difficult subject matter, such as race and racism. I also began looking for ways to be more inclusive in my teaching. It is difficult to teach outside of your comfort zone. I find myself including a lot of African-American artists into my teaching, but I need to make sure that I am including artists of all different races and cultural backgrounds, especially those that are represented in the classroom.

I abandoned my old practice of focusing on the “Master Artists,” such as Van Gogh, Matisse, and Renoir. I still include these artists in my curriculum, but I don’t focus on them as much as I did in the past. I try to include a wider variety of artists that I think my students will connect with, such as Kehinde Wiley and Michael Ray Charles. I focused on these two artists during my identity unit. I also included the work of Chuck Close. My students really enjoyed looking at the work of these artists.

One problem I encountered with the ideas presented in the course was not being comfortable introducing and discussing themes of sexuality with students. The course included a section about sexual identity and tolerance. We read an article by Chris Mayo, called *Teaching Against Homophobia Without Teaching the Subject*. This article discussed not singling out homosexuality as something different or other, but instead including it as just a normal part of the curriculum. Sexuality is a touchy subject for middle-schoolers, and not one that I would be ready to tackle. I don’t feel that their maturity level is high enough to take the information seriously. When the subject does come up, for instance, a student may ask if a certain artist is gay, I usually just answer honestly, and treat it as if it is not a big deal.

Another problem I encountered while teaching my unit on identity, was that some students couldn’t get past the surface value of some of the images of Michael Ray Charles that we looked at. They would just say things like “Oh, that’s so

racist!” even after I had shown the Art:21 video and discussed Charles’ reasons for making his artwork. Despite some of these setbacks, most students were very mature and insightful when looking at and discussing the images.

Before I took Dr. Hutzell’s course, I had planned to do a unit on identity. Taking the course allowed me to better plan and organize that unit. I felt very prepared for teaching it. I wanted to make sure that students didn’t feel like I was trying to impose my values or belief systems on them, but I also wanted to stress the importance of tolerance, and treating others fairly regardless of their differences. I included a definition list for students to refer to throughout the unit.

I feel that I did a good job of not imposing too much of myself into the identity unit. I offered opportunities for the students to share their own backgrounds and differences with the class. I created a short fill-in-the-blank worksheet that student used to fill in information about themselves (Exhibit 1). I then allowed volunteers to share their information with the class by reading it out loud. Nearly every student chose to share their information, and many of them were extremely eager to do so. This worksheet was the beginning of a series of lessons that would prove to be rich and rewarding learning experiences.

Exhibit 1

Who Am I?

I am _____. I am

(full name)

(age)

years old. I was born/ welcomed into my family on

_____ in

(date)

_____, _____ to _____
and

(city, state) (mother/guardian's name)
(father/guardian's name)

_____.

The race(s), nationality, and/or ethnicity I identify myself with is/are

_____.

My religious affiliation is

_____. My

exceptionality is _____.

Lesson and Unit Plan Development

As I developed my unit plan and lessons for my unit on identity, I focused on making sure I was presenting information in a fair and nonbiased way. In the past, I had never really considered how my own biases could affect my teaching. I also tried to include artists and viewpoints that were most representative of the students in my classes.

As a result of taking the multicultural course, I found myself incorporating a lot of ideas and material directly from the course. I thought that the *Ethnic Notions* video we were required to watch was such a powerful film, and I chose to include it in my teaching. However, I only showed it to my 8th graders, and I only showed a small portion of the film to them.

This was the first unit I developed that I felt was about something more than just making art. There were artmaking activities, but they weren't the sole focus of the

unit. They were more of a natural build up and assessment of what the students had learned about identity. In the past, I would first think of the projects I wanted to do, and then I would come up with a lesson to support the projects. With this unit on identity, it was the opposite. I first thought about what I wanted to teach, and then I would come up with the projects to support the concepts. This seems to be a more natural way of developing lessons and units.

The only real problem I encountered was some of the students not understanding the concepts behind the lessons and the artwork of the contemporary artists. These students would make a big deal about the images we looked at, and they would make comments that these things were “racist.” They were either not paying attention during class, were absent during key lessons, did not comprehend the information, or just wanted to be funny or disruptive during class.

My unit started out with a list of definitions (Exhibit 2). Students were given these definitions to keep in their folders and refer to throughout the unit. I instructed them to highlight a few of the key definitions. Students were also given the form in Exhibit 1 to fill out. In addition to this information, students were provided information about bullying, and shown a brief clip from the TV show *Glee*.

Exhibit 2

Identity Definition List

Identity – the fact of being who or what a person or thing is

Race – humans considered as a group based on common history, nationality, etc.

Nationality – the status of belonging to a particular nation

Ethnicity – the state of belonging to a social group that has a common cultural tradition

Multiculturalism – the doctrine that several different cultures can coexist peacefully

Pluralism – numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups coexisting

Tolerance – a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one's own

Exceptionality – having a quality that is significantly different from an established norm

Ableism – discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities

Disability – a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movement, senses, or activities

Racism – discrimination or prejudice based on race

Sexism – discrimination based on gender

Gender – the state of being male or female

Ageism – discrimination based on age

Religion – a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons

Family – a group of individuals living under one roof

Stereotype – defining all people belonging to a certain group into a mostly negative category that may only reflect a selected few

Sexual Orientation – defined by the gender a person is attracted to

Homophobia – an extreme and irrational aversion to people who are gay

Discrimination – the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people

Racial /Ethnic Slur – derogatory or disrespectful nickname for a racial or ethnic group

Bullying – activity that causes physical or mental harm to another person

The projects I included with this unit were an abstract self-portrait, a word portrait, and a final self-portrait. Not all grade levels were required to do every project. 8th graders did all three projects, 6th graders did the first two, and 7th graders just did the first one. The number of projects each grade level did was directly related to how many times a week I saw them. I saw 8th graders three times a week, 6th graders twice a week, and 7th graders once a week.

I also included a couple of skill building activities along with this unit. The first one was an activity where students learned to draw from a grid. This was done in

conjunction with the lesson on Chuck Close. The second activity was one, which allowed students to practice drawing the proportions of their faces. This was done in conjunction with the lesson on Kehinde Wiley.

In addition to the projects and skill building activities, I also incorporated a lot of art criticism and interpretation. I start out each day's lesson with a silent sketchbook activity. This usually involves students looking at, and analyzing, an artwork from an artist that is related to the unit we are studying. We spent the most time looking at and discussing the artwork of Michael Ray Charles.

The learning targets for the lesson on Michael Ray Charles were: 1) I can identify and interpret the artwork of Michael Ray Charles, and 2) I can identify stereotypes in advertising. For the first learning target, students were divided into groups of about 4 or 5. Each group had a different artwork of Michael Ray Charles' to look at. They first reflected on the image individually, and took notes in their sketchbooks. Then, they discussed the image as a group, and tried to come to a consensus on what they thought was the meaning behind the image.

One of the images students were given to look at was the artwork titled, *Beware* by Michael Ray Charles. This image shows a black caricature figure wearing red shorts and white gloves. The figure is whistling, and shown in a walking position. The figure is barefoot and has exaggerated features, typical of Michael Ray Charles' work --big lips, dark black skin, and nappy hair. The word, "BEWARE," is spelled out along the bottom of the painting in big black letters on a yellow background. Some students were easily able to make the connection to Disney from the style of shorts and gloves the character in the painting was wearing.

I also had students look at and analyze an image from a current magazine to determine whether or not there were stereotypes present. The image I had them look at was a Hidden Valley Ranch advertisement, which was somewhat in the style of Norman Rockwell. It showed a boy and a girl (of European decent) sitting

on a porch eating bowls of broccoli with salad dressing on it, like it was ice cream. The children were in front of a very nice home, and a chandelier could be seen through the window of the front door. The boy was dressed in a baseball uniform, and the girl was barefoot and wearing a dress and pigtails. Some students did not acknowledge seeing any stereotypes in the image, while others noticed a lot.

After teaching this unit on identity, I realized how powerful teaching art can be when it is designed to meet the needs of the student in the classroom. I intuitively knew the importance of teaching about identity and stereotypes, but I wasn't sure how to pull it all together until taking the Multicultural course. I want to continue to use the practices and methods I used in this unit. I will continually be questioning the artists I choose to show in class to make sure that they are representative of and applicable to the students I have in class. It is very important for students to be able to relate to what I'm teaching them.

Teaching Practices

I never used to question whether or not my teaching practices were inclusive. I always just assumed that since my background was similar to that of many of my students, being African-American and lower middle class, that my teaching would just naturally be representative of their interests. Taking the Multicultural course in Art Ed made me see that I need to be more aware and more intentional in my choices as a teacher. This includes the artists and processes I choose, as well as subject matter and how I teach it.

Race is not the only category with which to categorize a classroom of students. Religion, ability, gender, and other demographics also need to be taken into consideration. I have to make sure that I am giving careful attention to each one when planning and teaching my lessons. It is usually easier for me to plan a unit or lesson in the middle or towards the end of the school year, because by then I have gotten to know my students pretty well. I feel it benefits me to allow for a lot

of flexibility in my lesson plans. I usually just start with a general idea of what I want to teach, and then add to my ideas as I go. This allows me to be more responsive to my students and their needs and preferences.

The Multicultural course made me think about the things I had taken for granted, such as gender and family structure. I knew that these things had some impact on student learning, but I did not realize my teaching had the ability to lessen or widen the impact. I realized that I could not exist inside a bubble as a teacher. I had to seriously consider the wide variety of things that made my students unique and different from me.

The biggest change that resulted from this course was the modification of my unit on identity. Without having taken the multicultural course, I think the information I presented would not have been as effective. I gave an assessment at the end of the course to find out what students thought about the unit, and to find out how much information they remembered (Exhibit 3). The results varied. Some students seemed to have gotten a lot out of it, while others were still confused about the material.

Exhibit 3

2nd Trimester Art Assessment

Write what you know about the following artists and their work (at least 3 sentences for each).

Michael Ray Charles:

Chuck Close:

Kehinde Wiley:

Which of these artists did you enjoy learning about the most and why?

What is a stereotype?

Did you like doing the Abstract Self-Portrait? Why or why not?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much did you enjoy this identity unit?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Reason:

Taking a random sampling of 41 students from all three grade levels, 27 rated the unit a 7 or below, 12 rated it an 8 or higher, and 2 did not rate it at all. The reasons some of the students gave for giving lower ratings were:

I don't really like self; portraits ect,

I don't think I was here for most of the stuff

I'm not that into art

Its not the kind of art I typicly like

I don't enjoy watching stuff like that. Like about artist

It was boring

It was ok.

I liked some but not all

It was really hard to remember stuff, and there were a lot of videos.

The reasons some of the students gave for giving higher ratings were:

I like art.

I like looking at stereotypes and finding out what I fall in.

It inspires me

I love learning about so many artists.

I got to draw myself

I like to learn about art

These surveys helped me to view my teaching and curriculum through the eyes of the students. Some students enjoyed watching the videos of contemporary artists, while others did not. Some students prefer to just focus on artmaking versus developing the conceptual ideas behind it. Regardless of student preferences, I noticed a higher quality of artwork being produced by students. I believe that this increase in quality was due to my incorporation of various ideas from the multicultural course into my curriculum.

Student Work

I tried a lot of new approaches to student artwork during this unit. Whenever I designed an artmaking project, I kept thinking about its relation to the topic I was teaching. This resulted in the projects being more purposeful and meaningful. I even used an idea for a project that I had devised and discussed with another teacher during the Multicultural course at Ohio State. This project was the Abstract Self-Portrait. I also tried to incorporate a lot more preplanning activities in the form of worksheets, and post-artwork reflections in the form of artist statements.

In the past, I had merely provided a little background on an artist and/or technique, and then assigned students a related project. As a result of taking this graduate course, I intentionally provided more background on, not only artists and techniques, but also on the theme or big idea of the unit. I noticed that students did not question or complain about the projects as much as they would have in past units.

I abandoned my old practices of focusing solely on artmaking processes, and adopted a more comprehensive teaching methodology. For example, during my unit on identity, I focused on issues of tolerance, defining identity, looking at the work of contemporary artists who use the big idea of identity, and defining and understanding the purpose of stereotypes.

The final artworks that the students produced during this unit were more thoughtful and interesting than the artwork they produced in previous units. There was also a lot more variety. Instead of following a formulaic procedure to produce a piece of artwork, students were given the freedom to choose their own process.

The first project I had the students complete was an activity that required them to create symbols for words that described them. The learning target for this project was, *I can create a self-portrait that incorporates symbolism*. Students were given the choice of using a template to create the outline of their head, neck, and shoulders, or they could draw their own. Most students used the template. Before creating the artwork, students were required to fill out a worksheet (Exhibit 4) . The worksheet instructed students to come up with about 10 different words to describe themselves. They were encouraged to use words relating to race, gender, ethnicity, etc.). Once students came up with their words, they created a unique symbol for each one. They were also given the option of choosing a color to associate with each word/symbol combination.

After completing the worksheet, students began drawing their Abstract Self-Portraits. The end result was very interesting. Although the basic process was basically the same for each student during this project, the artworks that emerged still contained a lot of diversity and variety. One student filled in her entire head and shoulders outline with small symbols that related to her identity, such as the female symbol, light bulbs, and smiley faces. She also used a lot of color (Exhibit 5). Another student filled in his outline with a guitar, a football, and various other symbols that related to his interests (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 4

Abstract Self-Portrait

Learning Target: I can create a self-portrait that incorporates symbolism.

Materials: Self-portrait template, self-portrait worksheet, ultra-fine point sharpie, watercolor set, white cardstock or heavy paper, rough draft paper, pencil, colored pencils

Instructions:

1. Use the self-portrait template to create an outline on your sheet of paper.
2. Fill out your abstract self-portrait worksheet.
3. Fill in your self-portrait using the symbols you created on your worksheet.
4. Add color using colored pencils.
5. Show your rough draft and worksheet to the teacher to receive the paper for your final.

6. Redraw your image on the final paper.
7. Outline in ultra-fine sharpie.
8. Color in your image using watercolors.
9. Turn in your rough draft, worksheet and final to the teacher at the end of class. (Make sure your name is on each).

Grading Rubric

	ME	EE
Craftsmanship	-image was drawn neatly, but has 1 or 2 small issues -image was colored in carefully, but contains some scribbles or excess white space	- image contains a lot of detail - image was drawn with extreme care and there are no unnecessary stray marks - image was colored in with extreme care (no scribbles or excess white space).
Use of Symbolism	- image includes at least 10 different symbols - most symbols are very simple	- image includes more than 10 different symbols - most symbols are complex

Abstract Self-Portrait Worksheet

Fill in the chart below using the terms from your definition sheet as they relate to your own identity. For example, you may choose the term "race" from the definition sheet. Then, you would fill in column 1 with the words that you feel best describe your race (i.e. Black, Asian, White). In column 2, you create a symbol for each piece of your identity. In column 3, you may also choose a color for each identity descriptor.

Key

Identity	Symbol	Color (optional)
<i>Example: Female</i>	#####	<i>Orange</i>
<i>Male</i>	~~~~~	<i>Green</i>
<i>Athletic</i>	\$\$\$\$\$\$\$	<i>Brown</i>
1.		

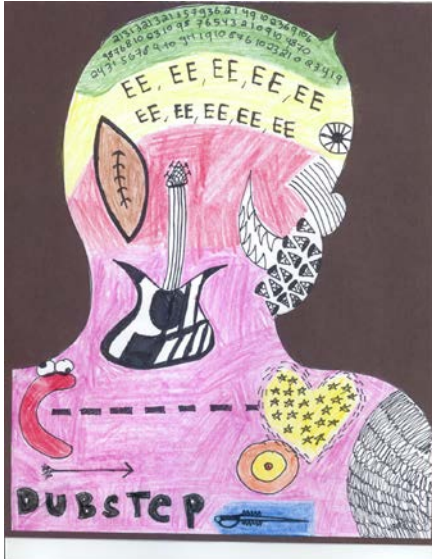
Exhibit 5

Abstract Self-Portrait #1



Exhibit 6

Abstract Self-Portrait #2



The final project that I had students work on for this unit was a Final Self-Portrait. Only the 8th graders did this project because I saw them more often during the week. The learning target for this project was, *Using inspiration from the artist we learned about in class, I can create a self-portrait that addresses a stereotype or misconception about myself.* As I mentioned previously, the artwork that resulted from this project was pretty significant.

One student, who has Asperger' Syndrome, took a unique perspective on the project. He created a self-portrait in the style of a stereotypical teenager (Exhibit 7). He focused on the stereotype that all teenagers are lazy, and drew a stick figure. He also labeled the various parts of his drawing, creating a humorous depiction of this stereotype.

Another student used his final self-portrait to address the stereotype of the white male. In his artist statement, he discussed how people have a generic image in their minds of how white men should look, dress, and act. His self-portrait was a carefully drawn portrait of himself in a suit (Exhibit 8).

Some students chose to survey other students in their class to find out what they had initially thought of them before they got to know them. One student who did this used the words that were generated from her survey of the class to create her portrait (Exhibit 9). In her artist statement she said, "When people look at my work I want them to see how sad it is to be judged and to stop and think before you talk." The words she used in her portrait were, "quiet," "pink," "stuck up," "prep," and "better than you."

Exhibit 7



Exhibit 8



Exhibit 9



The student artwork and artist statements revealed that the students had a thorough understanding of the concepts, such as defining stereotypes, discussed during the identity unit. I think the biggest contributor to this was the choice of teaching material, and the way in which it was presented. Everything had a purpose and was intended to naturally lead up to the final artmaking activity. The Multicultural course had a big impact on this unit, but the other courses in the Mostly Online Art Education Masters program at Ohio State also contributed to the success of this unit. I felt that I was able to combine my learning from all of the courses taken over the past two years and make a comprehensive and effective curriculum.

Physical Environment

The physical environment in the art classroom is always changing. As new work is completed, the old work comes down, and the new work is put up. The materials change with the needs of each project. Seating assignments are often switched up. I try to create a balance between changing things in the classroom and keeping some things consistent.

The artists that are displayed around the room vary. I currently have work on display by Red Grooms, Matisse, and Kehinde Wiley. I am constantly aware of the impact that the classroom environment has on students, and how important it is to see themselves reflected in the environment. Before taking the Multicultural course, I was not quite as aware of this.

I try to make sure I have diversity in the artwork that I show. I still struggle with finding artists outside of the mainstream or dominant culture. Sometimes the information is not as readily accessible, so it's easier to go with a commonly used artist, such as Van Gogh or Monet. I am gradually getting more comfortable with researching and presenting artists that aren't as mainstream. I plan on continuing to make my classroom environment more diverse and culturally friendly.

The Multicultural course was an invaluable part of the Art Education Masters Program. I learned so much about what it means to really embrace and promote a diverse environment. I realized how important it is to give students examples of artists that they can relate to. For too long I had existed in my own bubble of how and what I should teach students. It wasn't until I was exposed to the Multicultural course that I realized how much of a disservice it is to students for a teacher to exist in such a bubble. Using the knowledge I have gained from this course, I will be able to provide a better, more well-rounded art education curriculum to my students. One that encourages them to see the world through the eyes of a diverse selection of artists, and one that allows them to see themselves reflected in the world around them.

Conclusion

What and *how* to teach were the big questions I came into the Mostly Online program with. What I came away with was a comprehensive approach, or series of approaches, to try with students. Each course was a piece of a larger puzzle that could be fit together in many different ways. The OSU program emphasized that there is no one-size-fits-all method of teaching. Just as every student is different, so is every teacher, and teaching is all about figuring out what works for your particular students.

Visual Culture is an idea I learned about during the graduate program. It involves incorporating the images we see in society into our teaching. I have used this idea numerous times in my classroom. The most recent example is one where I had my students use color schemes to color in drawings of popular athletic shoes. They were so excited to color in the shoes. Many students asked for extra copies to take home and work on for fun.

This is just one example of how the things I have learned about in this graduate program have helped me to engage my students. I am constantly looking for cues from my students about what they are interested in, and then I try to find a way to incorporate that into my lesson plans in an educational way. This is all apart of *action research*, another concept I learned about during my coursework.

So, what and how I currently teach as an art educator draws from the immense wealth of knowledge I now have about how to approach art education. My experiences learning art as a child were purely project and skills based. I enjoyed it because I had a natural talent for art, and it was something that came easily to me. Now, I often think about how much more enriching my experience would have been if I had teachers who approached teaching art the same way that I do. I never learned about specific contemporary artists and why they made art. I never had the opportunity to discuss possible meanings behind artworks. I never considered big ideas and how they could connect my artwork to the rest of the world.

I'm glad that I am able to provide experiences and opportunities for my students that I never had. I know that what they are learning is preparing them to engage in the world as active citizens rather than as passive bystanders. My approach is not the typical art education approach that I grew up with and was so familiar with, but it's an approach that makes sense with our constantly changing society. I have opened up the doors of my classroom to the outside, and I allow it to influence my teaching. I think it's very important for art education not to be taught in a vacuum. Otherwise, students won't care about what you're teaching, and art will become "just some project I did in art class."

The artmaking process is very important, but so is the thinking and planning that comes before the artmaking. This is probably the most important thing I've learned and taken away with me from my time in the graduate program. I have noticed a change in my students and in the way they work. Even the ones who have very little artistic talent, are interested and engaged in Art class. Being only in my second year as a teacher, I still have a long way to go to get my classroom to where I would like it to be. But, with all the knowledge and experience I've gained over the past two years, I can already see the positive changes that have taken place. My teaching will always be a work in progress, and I will always be editing and revising my process, using the feedback I get from my students. The education I have gained from my time in the OSU Mostly Online Art Ed program

has provided me with a solid foundation on which I can build a relevant, engaging and comprehensive art learning experiences for my students.

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